# Violent arrests follow police rampage at Sydney anti-genocide protest

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Backed by the state Labor government, New South Wales (NSW) police are conducting violent pre-dawn raids to arrest people whom police attacked viciously on February 9 at a protest at Sydney Town Hall against the visit of Israeli President Isaac Herzog, a leading figure in the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

A police video, literally boasting of the operation, shows eight heavily-armed police commandos storming the home of a 42-year-old woman. She was dragged out of bed at 5 a.m. on March 26 and handcuffed after the police smashed open her front door. A photograph, posted by her lawyer Nick Hanna, shows the wrecked door.

The police video shows a squad of officers wearing helmets, face masks and vests marching along the street and then barging into her home. The footage later cuts to the woman being bundled into a police van.

Similar raids have been carried out against at least four other people across Sydney in recent days, taking the numbers arrested over the Herzog protest to more than 26. They have been charged with serious offences, such as affray and intimidating or assaulting police, some punishable by years of imprisonment.

This is despite widely viewed videos from February 9 showing numerous unprovoked brutal police attacks on demonstrators, some of whom suffered major injuries.

Significantly, the protest in Sydney was part of a nationwide event opposing the Herzog visit, joined by more than 20,000 people in Melbourne, some 10,000 in Sydney, 5,000 in Brisbane and thousands more in other capital cities and regional centres.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, whose Labor government has continued to defend the Israeli destruction of Gaza, invited Herzog, even though a United Nations inquiry had found that the Israeli president incited genocide against the Palestinians.

Moreover, Albanese and other Labor leaders, notably NSW Premier Chris Minns, immediately defended the police rampage against the demonstrators. Albanese declared that the protesters had been told they would not be allowed to march, and Minns denounced them as violent, without a skerrick of evidence.

The Labor leaders had insisted that Herzog must be "respected" and fraudulently presented his trip as an opportunity for him to mourn the victims of the December 14 terrorist attack at Sydney's Bondi Beach. The real purpose of the visit was to forcibly intimidate or suppress mass opposition to the genocide and to normalise war crimes. That has been on full display, both during the February 9 police rampage and now the wave of police raids.

A police statement said the arrested woman was subsequently charged with hindering or resisting police, intimidating police without actual bodily harm, throwing a missile at police without actual bodily harm and using indecent or threatening language in a major event area.

She was granted conditional bail to appear at court on April 15. She must report to the police three times a week and not go within 300 metres of Sydney Town Hall, which is a traditional location for political demonstrations.

In a social media post, Hanna said the police entered the home while his client was asleep and half naked. "I've been a criminal lawyer for almost 20 years, and I don't think I've ever seen anything like what happened today."

Hanna said his client went to a protest against a war criminal and was not alleged to pose any ongoing danger. The main police allegations were that she "threw a water bottle at an officer and then threatened to assault another officer if he touched her." He said the police seized her phone and required her to provide the passcode.

Other arrests announced by the police last week include a 27-year-old woman charged with assaulting a police officer in the execution of duty, hindering or resisting a police officer in the execution of duty and possession of cannabis. In another raid, a 31-year-old woman was charged with affray and offensive or indecent behaviour within a major event area, and another person was raided on March 26.

Many more protestors could be charged after being injured by the police at the Herzog rally. According to the police, the investigations and operations—named Strike Force

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NSW Police arrested 27 people at the Sydney Town Hall protest, with nine charged and others eventually released. Widely circulated footage showed officers punching, pepper-spraying and charging at attendees. Among those whose assaults were recorded was 76-year-old journalist and documentary filmmaker James Ricketson, who was attacked by riot cops and pinned to the ground.

A young man was pinned to the ground by two officers and punched at least 18 times while prone and face down on light-rail tracks. In another attack, after a police officer tripped over his own bicycle, a riot cop responded by repeatedly punching a middle-aged man with his hands in the air. Other footage showed officers shoving and dragging Muslims in prayer outside the town hall.

Jann Alhafny, a 69-year-old grandmother, was shoved to the ground and had to be hospitalised with four fractured lumbar vertebrae. Even NSW Greens parliamentarians Jenny Leong and Abigail Boyd, who were acting as negotiators or legal observers, were bashed or pepper-sprayed.

A free legal clinic recently involved nearly a dozen law firms providing advice to 60 people who were assaulted. Hanna, one of the organisers of the clinic, said lawyers heard some "horrific" stories of police violence.

"Peaceful protesters sustained broken bones, deep lacerations and extensive bruising. Others had respiratory issues and skin irritations from the chemicals deployed by the police," Hanna said. "Many weren't injured but were arrested or detained without any apparent lawful basis and released later without charge."

The Labor governments' support for the police assault was underlined in state parliament last week. NSW Greens MP Leong was removed from the lower house during Question Time on March 25 when she attempted to provide Premier Minns with 117 individual accounts of police brutality at the Herzog protest.

Minns contemptuously said he was "not going to commit to reading all of those." As Leong was leaving the chamber, he accused MPs of misusing Question Time "to slur the police and to slur the government." Police Minister Yasmin Catley later derided Leong's actions as "a stunt."

The charges laid against the anti-genocide protesters could lead to lengthy imprisonment. Affray, which is defined as using or threatening unlawful violence that causes a reasonable person to fear for their safety, carries a maximum penalty of 10 years. Assaulting a police officer can mean five years in jail, or up to 14 years for aggravated offences that cause injury.

All the growing evidence points to the violent police assault and ongoing arrests being conducted at the behest of the Labor governments. Working with the Albanese federal government, Minns' state government was determined to prevent any public display of opposition to the visit of Herzog and to use his provocative trip to set a precedent for police-state repression.

In the lead up to the Herzog demonstrations, the NSW Labor government invoked extraordinary legislation that it passed in the wake of the Bondi Beach attack, providing the state's police commissioner with the power to ban protest marches for up to three months.

Then, two days before the protest, the government used other laws to declare Herzog's visit a "major event," activating draconian provisions that gave the police wider powers to search and arrest people and control access to almost the entire Sydney central business district and its eastern suburbs.

The scale of the violence strongly indicates police were told that they could do whatever they wished to disperse the crowd. The cops kettled protesters near the Sydney Town Hall steps and pepper-sprayed them indiscriminately, threatening a crowd crush as some retreated back into Town Hall square. Dozens of riot cops then charged at the remaining demonstrators, pushing, trampling and hitting those who did not get away.

Numbers of participants likened the rampage to the actions of US President Donald Trump's administration in Minneapolis, where Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have carried out a reign of terror, including the murders of Renée Good and Alex Pretti in January.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* stated, the coordinated rampage on February 9, and the entire Herzog visit, was a turning point in Australian politics. By backing the police repression of dissent, the Labor governments signalled their full support for imperialist war and barbarism, not just in Palestine but globally, and their readiness to tear up basic democratic rights.

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